Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union

BCTGM News

March/April 2019

Volume 21
Number 2

Take ACTION
Pages 5 & 16

SAFE JOBS

EVERY WORKER'S RIGHT

*See pages 8-9

the PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

NAFTA has been a DISASTER for Working People

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed into law in 1993, has been an unmitigated disaster for working people across the U.S. and Canada. Over the last 25 years, nearly one million good, middle-class American and Canadian jobs have been outsourced to Mexico as we watched working families' standard of living deteriorate. The BCTGM, along with the rest of the labor movement, predicted at the time that companies would outsource jobs to Mexico to take advantage of low pay, lax regulatory standards, and no independent unions if NAFTA were enacted. And that is exactly what happened.

After decades of ravaging our economies, NAFTA is now being renegotiated because working people have demanded it. Our hard work on trade issues since NAFTA have made clear that the original, failed NAFTA cannot stand.

U.S. President Donald Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau have touted the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) as the solution, yet the new deal does not have a concrete way of ensuring that corporations will not continue to outsource work to Mexico. While the new deal states that Mexico will raise labor protections for its workers by raising wages and allowing independent unions, there are no strong enforcement tools to ensure this happens. Without these tools, we can expect more outsourcing and attacks on our hard-earned wages, benefits and rights.

BCTGM members have seen the devastating consequences of failed trade deals for decades. We lost thousands of jobs as Mondelez, Hershey and Kellogg have closed plants in Canada and the U.S. and sent most of those jobs to Mexico. We've also seen many of the biggest candy companies flee to Mexico. We're tired of it, and we won't accept anything less than a new NAFTA that works for U.S. and Canadian workers —not a rebranded corporate giveaway.

The BCTGM has taken a leadership role in labor's fight through our Mondelez/Nabisco campaign. The rampant outsourcing of BCTGM jobs to Mexico by Mondelez and its continued threat to outsource more, combined with its exploitation of workers in Mexico and American consumers, epitomizes all that is wrong with NAFTA.

America's working families cannot support the revised NAFTA without additional changes to the text and supporting provisions in implementing legislation.

The current document provides more promises than it does concrete solutions. While there are some improvements to the original labor and environmental rules, these modest changes aren't enough to ensure working families will benefit.

Some of the revised deal's rules are even worse than the current NAFTA, including monopoly rights for pharmaceutical corporations that will keep drug prices sky high and new rules that will undermine public interest protections, such as those that keep workers safe on the job.

In addition, the labor rules retain important weaknesses from the original NAFTA, including loopholes that limit their reach. Trade rules are simply hollow words unless backed by swift and certain enforcement. Without this, Mexican workers will continue to face threats and violence when trying to join an independent union. Without a legitimate union and contract, Mexico's workers will continue to be exploited as their wages remain suppressed.

Rather than accepting that this is the best that the three countries can do, the labor movement is urging the parties to get back to the table to fight for an iron-clad agreement that working people can endorse and be proud of. And that means an agreement that raises wages, protects workers and grows our economy.

Working people bear the burden of the continuing failures of NAFTA and its impact on our jobs, our environment, our communities and our democracy.

We know the solution isn't less trade, but better rules – rules that put families and communities first. That has been our goal since day one and our standard to support any new deal.

If a new NAFTA continues to allow corporate CEOs to close shop in the U.S. and move to Mexico in pursuit of low wages and weak labor and environmental standards, the renegotiation will have been a failure.

- David B. Durkee, BCTGM International President

BCTGM News

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Durkee Meets with Top Mexican Trade, Labor Officials

In March, BCTGM International President David Durkee met with powerful leaders of the Mexican government to discuss the labor practices of Mondelez-Nabisco in Salinas Victoria, Mexico.

Pictured here at the AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting are (from left) Intl. Secy. Treas. Steve Bertelli, Asst. to Intl. Pres. Harry Kaiser, BCTGM Intl. Pres. David Durkee, Mexico's chief trade negotiator Dr. Jesus Seade and AFL-CIO Pres. Richard Trumka.

Durkee met with Dr. Jesus Seade, Mexico's Undersecretary for North America and chief trade negotiator, and Mexican Senator and labor leader Napoleon Gomez Urrutia.

Mexico's new government under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador is pursing major labor law reform. The BCTGM anticipates that Mondelez-Nabisco could become a focus of the government in targeting corporate practices of worker exploitation, poverty wages, and union protection contracts in the country.

President Durkee provided the Mexican officials with the Salinas Victoria protection contract and requested that officials investigate the company's corporate behavior in Mexico.

Jesús Seade, who led the NAFTA negotiations on behalf of the Mexican government in 2018, has served as Mexico's Ambassador to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and concurrently as chief negotiator for the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and for Mexico's accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, president and general secretary of the Mexican Union of Miners and Metalworkers' Union, known as Los Mineros, was elected Senator as part of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's National Regeneration Movement (Morena) party. The Mexican union leader returned to his country to be sworn in as Senator on August 29, 2018, after living 12 years in exile due to threats to his life for his union activity. Labor leaders around the world have honored Gómez's courage and united behind him and the campaign for democratic unions in Mexico.

Intl. Pres. David Durkee (left) and Mexican Senator and labor leader Napoleon Gomez Urrutia (right). Durkee holds a signed copy of the Mexican Senator's book, *Collapse of Dignity: The Story of a Mining Tragedy and the Fight Against Greed and Corruption in Mexico.*

Gómez, who has been unanimously reelected as leader of Los Mineros multiple times, has vowed to lead the fight against protection contracts in Mexico (negotiated between corrupt unions and employers with no worker input or approval), as well as other violations of trade union rights in Mexico.

Meanwhile, at the AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting on March 14, the new NAFTA was a major topic and extensive discussion centered around labor's position on the flawed trade deal. President Durkee serves as a Vice President of the AFL-CIO on the Executive Council.

Following the meeting, the Executive Council issued a statement opposing the new NAFTA, stating that if the Trump administration insists on a premature vote on the new agreement in its current form, labor will forcefully oppose it.

The labor leaders emphasized that trade policy must further the advancement of a just, inclusive and sustainable economy for all working people—and that the labor movement would mobilize to defeat any deal that doesn't meet that standard, just as we defeated the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

"Trade deals don't have to be giveaways to corporations. They can protect jobs at home and raise wages for workers everywhere. But that requires prioritizing people like BCTGM members over a handful of executives," notes President Durkee. "NAFTA sold out working families in North America and Mexico. President Trump's new NAFTA agreement is set to be more of the same. If Mexico fails to implement labor law reforms and the president fails to secure strong enforcement tools, this deal won't do a thing for workers."

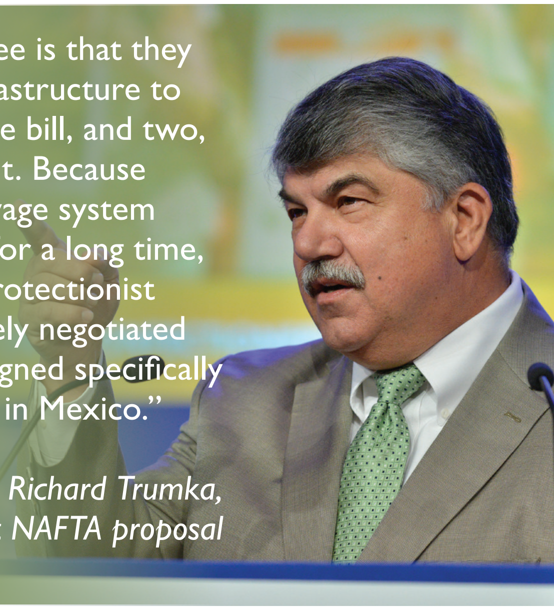
Gómez said the new Mexican government is fully committed to fighting the unfair trade agreement. "We also want to take steps to ensure that the North American Free Trade Agreement recognizes and protects the employment rights of workers across the United States, Canada and Mexico. We are looking to make real changes that will help to build a future in which the wellbeing of the working class is ensured."

The North American FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

or NAFTA 2.0, presently known as USMCA, is the same bad trade deal with a new name. Here is what some of the experts have to say about the still flawed trade pact:

"The concerns that our members have are workers' rights, the environment and issues related to pharmaceuticals. The overarching concern that we have is — even if you have the best language in the world in that [deal], if you don't have enforcement, you ain't got nothin'. … You have to have strong enforcement provisions. No enforcement, no treaty"

– House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.)



"What we want to see is that they have — one, the infrastructure to be able to enforce the bill, and two, the resources to do it. Because we're talking a low-wage system that's been in effect for a long time, with over 700,000 protectionist contracts, illegitimately negotiated and put in place, designed specifically to keep wages down in Mexico."

– AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, on the current NAFTA proposal

"All the NAFTA renegotiation efforts in the world will not create U.S. jobs, raise U.S. wages or reduce the U.S. trade deficit if the new rules do not include clear, strong and effective labor rules that require Mexico to abandon its low wage policy."

– Celeste Drake, AFL-CIO trade policy specialist

"The USMCA will continue to encourage firms to offshore production. The locations may change, from Mexico and Canada to China, Vietnam or Malaysia, but the results will remain the same. These negotiations, and the models used to assess their impacts, aren't getting the job done for working Americans. It's time to go back to the drawing board, for all of us."

– Robert E. Scott, EPI Senior Economist and Director of Trade and Manufacturing Policy Research

"I'm going to judge any agreement based on whether it will make life better for real people in Ohio, not bureaucratic formulas that have failed to tell the whole story time and time again. So, I'm more focused on the fact that we already know the President's deal didn't stop GM from closing factories across the U.S. than what a report says might happen in the future. It's clear we have work to do to make sure NAFTA works for Ohio workers."

– U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio)

NO VOTE
UNTIL NAFTA IS FIXED

AMERICA'S WORKING FAMILIES HAVE SUFFERED the consequences of bad trade deals negotiated behind closed doors. We lived the failures of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) when we saw good union jobs shipped overseas. The solution isn't less trade, but better rules—rules that put America's working families first.

For 25 years, we've demanded that NAFTA be renegotiated, and this is our chance to get it right. But corporate CEOs and the Chamber of Commerce are ramping up a multimillion-dollar campaign to pass the new NAFTA, without the vital protections for workers the deal needs.

Congress should not put the new NAFTA to a vote until working people and our needs have been prioritized in the agreement. There should be no vote on the new NAFTA until it has been fixed and working people and our jobs have been secured. That means an agreement that raises wages, creates and secures jobs, protects our environment, and safeguards our democracy.

CALL

1-855-856-7545

AND TELL YOUR REPRESENTATIVE:

NO VOTE UNTIL NAFTA IS FIXED

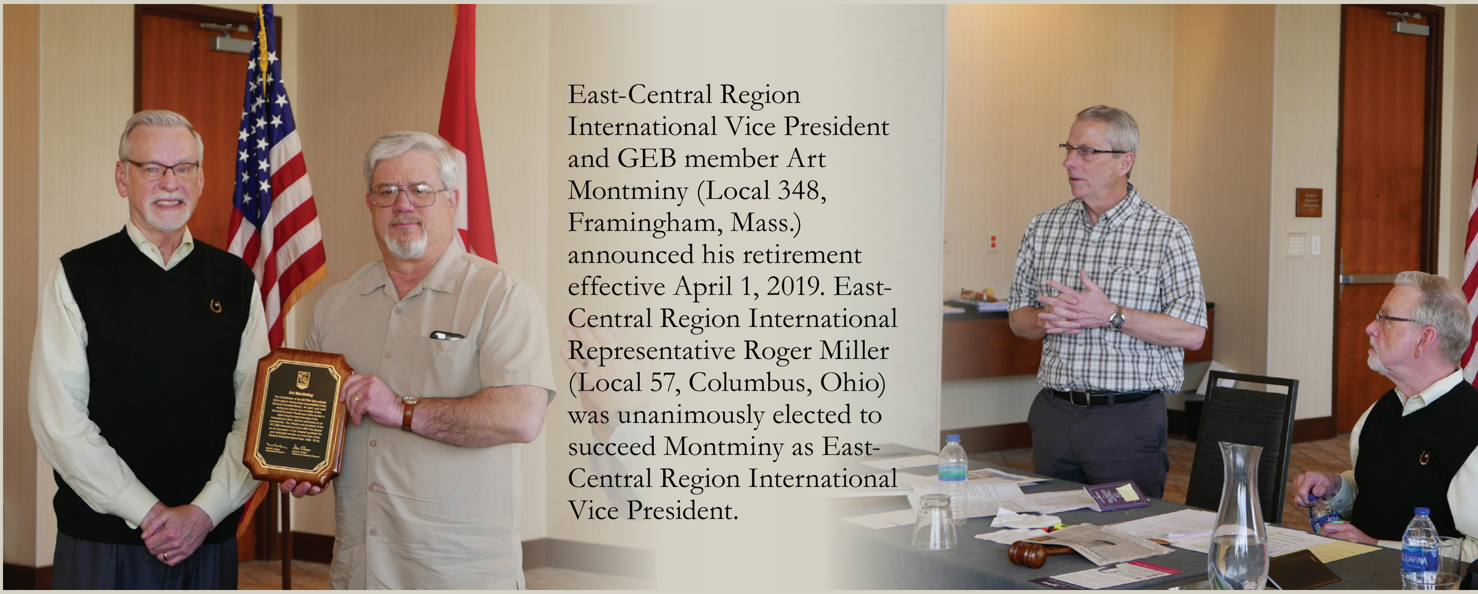
JOIN THE AFL-CIO'S FAIR TRADE CAMPAIGN BY TEXTING TRADE TO 235246.

*MESSAGING AND DATA RATES MAY APPLY.

106th GEB Honors Retirements, ELECTS NEW LEADERS

During the 106th session of the BCTGM General Executive Board (GEB), held March 28 to April 1 in San Antonio, Texas, the following changes were made to the executive leadership of the BCTGM International Union and General Executive Board:

BCTGM International Secretary-Treasurer and GEB member Steve Bertelli (Local 1, Chicago) announced his retirement effective June 1, 2019. Midwest Region International Vice President and GEB member Jethro Head (Local 1, Chicago) was unanimously elected to succeed Bertelli as BCTGM International Secretary-Treasurer.



East-Central Region International Vice President and GEB member Art Montminy (Local 348, Framingham, Mass.) announced his retirement effective April 1, 2019. East-Central Region International Representative Roger Miller (Local 57, Columbus, Ohio) was unanimously elected to succeed Montminy as East-Central Region International Vice President.

Midwest Region International Representative and former GEB member Brad Schmidt (Local 218, Kansas City, Mo.) was unanimously elected to succeed Head as Midwest Region International Vice President.

Western Region GEB member and recently retired Local 114 (Portland, Ore.) Financial Secretary-Treasurer Terry Lansing announced his retirement from the GEB effective April 1, 2019. Local 9 (Seattle) Financial Secretary-Treasurer Mary Trujillo was unanimously elected to fill the GEB Western Region vacancy.

Other GEB Recognition

Western Region GEB member Local 31 Financial Secretary (Long Beach, Calif.) Doyle Townson was presented with a 50-year BCTGM gold card and certificate signifying his long tenure with the Union. Townson joined the BCTGM on June 1, 1968 and was first elected to the GEB in 2000.

Strategic Campaign Coordinator Ron Baker announced his retirement effective August 1, 2019. President Durkee presented Baker with a special plaque honoring his service to the BCTGM. Assistant to the Strategic Campaign Coordinator Nate Zeff (Local 6, Philadelphia) will succeed Baker.

BCTGM Continues Figh

Despite the initial success of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, signed into law in 1970, thousands of workers in the United States are killed on the job each year, while millions more are injured.

In 2017, nearly 5,200 workers lost their lives while on the job. Another 95,000 other workers will die from occupational diseases caused by toxic chemical exposures and other health hazards. In addition, employers reported 2.8 million injuries and illnesses in private-sector workplaces.

According to BCTGM International President David Durkee, these staggering numbers should be sounding alarm bells through all levels of government. “The OSH Act was passed 50 years ago. So much about our workplaces have changed. The toxins have changed. The work systems have has changed. And yet the Act remains outdated and incomplete,” said Durkee.

BCTGM members face a host of hazards at their workplaces that can lead to serious injuries including amputations, strains, sprains, blunt force trauma, slips and falls, grain engulfment, electric shocks, and heat and cold stress.

One of the most common hazards BCTGM members encounter is repetitive motion which can cause Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD’s). Repetitive motion occurs when a worker does the same motion over an extended period of time, like a typical 8 or 10 hour shift. Multiply those movements 5-6 days per week, 50 weeks a year and the wear and tear on the body leads to injuries to workers’ joints, elbows, shoulders, back, neck, knee and wrist.

According to OSHA, Musculoskeletal disorders accounted for 32% of all serious workplace injuries in 2017. However, there is no OSHA standard to protect workers from repetitive motion disorders. In 2001, shortly after taking office, the Administration of George W. Bush utilized a rarely-used procedural rule that repealed the Clinton-era Ergonomics Standard, and simultaneously prevented similar standards from being enacted. Without a standard, workers continue to be injured by repetitive motion, most of which are not even reported to their employers.

Politics plays a big role in keeping meaningful change from happening at OSHA. Organizations against government regulations, like the Chamber of Commerce and groups representing industry, like the American Bakers Association and the National Association of Manufacturers, have high-priced lobbyists pressuring OSHA leaders, as well as members of Congress and the White House, to defeat efforts at expanding worker protections on the job.

Another factor that keeps injury and illness rates so high is that employers are just not scared of OSHA. Federal OSHA and the 27 OSHA state plans together have approximately 2,200 inspectors charged with protecting more than 130 million workers in more than 8 million workplaces across the country. Employers know that OSHA is not likely going to do a surprise visit, so there is little incentive to fix machine guarding, ensure workers wear harnesses when working at certain heights, keeping walkways clear of debris, and making sure employees have the proper protective equipment when needed.

In addition, penalties to employers that do violate OSHA standards do not act as a deterrent because of how low they are. In 2018, the average penalty for a “serious” violation of the OSH Act was only $3,580. The median penalty in fatality cases was only $10,348, reduced to $7,761 after settlements.

The labor movement has long advocated for much harsher penalties against employers that violate the Act, including higher

t for Safe Workplaces

fines, fines that would be based on the number of employees exposed to the hazard, and fines and/or jail time to managers and supervisors that knowingly disregard OSHA regulations that put workers at risk.

"Not only is it a legal obligation for employers to keep our members safe on the job, it is also a moral one," said Durkee.

In addition, according to former OSHA head David Michaels, the cost of injured workers to employers and to the economy in general is staggering. "The most disabling injuries (those involving 6 or more days away from work) cost American employers more than $53 billion a year – over $1 billion a week – in workers' compensation costs alone. Indirect costs to employers, such as costs of down time for other employees as a result of the accident, investigations, claims adjustment, legal fees, and associated property damage can be up to double these costs. Costs to employees and their families through wage losses uncompensated by workers' compensation, household responsibilities, and family care for the workers further increase the total costs to the economy, even without considering pain and suffering," said Michaels.

Combustible Dust Remains a Threat to BCTGM Members

A common hazard BCTGM members encounter in the grain milling and sugar sectors is the threat of a combustible dust explosion. A dust explosion may occur when a certain amount of combustible dust is dispersed through the air in sufficient concentration to cause a violent reaction when ignited by a flame, spark, or other ignition source.

Fatalities from combustible dust explosions in the grain milling industry, skyrocketed in the 1970's. Along with other serious hazards in the industry, OSHA enacted a Grain Handling Standard in 1985 to combat these safety concerns. Part of that standard minimally addressed combustible dust as a hazard. However, the section pertaining to combustible dust was limited, did not affect other sectors of the food and tobacco sectors, and did not include employee involvement and training.

Grain elevator explosion in Sioux City, Iowa on May 29, 2018.

Since the passage of the Standard, combustible dust fires and explosions continued to cause injuries and fatalities, and cost employers millions in clean-up, renovations, and fines.

According to the Combustible Dust Incident Database (CDID), which was established in 2016 to track fires and explosions that are the result of combustible dust, in 2017 there were 132 fires, 32 explosions, 61 injuries and six fatalities in the United States and Canada. In the first half of 2018, there were 75 fires, 32 explosions, nine injuries and one fatality in the United States and Canada.

EXPLOSION Trends

The U.S. Chemical Safety Board also analyzes combustible dust flash fires and explosion trends and reported the following:

1980-2005: 11 Explosions, 28 Injuries and 5 Fatalities Per Year

2001-2005: 19 Explosions, 43 Injuries and 9 Fatalities Per Year

2016-2018: 31 Explosions, 34 Injuries and 4 Fatalities Per Year

Former Hostess Worker EXPLAINS TO CONGRESS the EFFECTS of the PENSION FUNDING CRISIS

James Morgan, BCTGM Local 1 (Chicago) member and former Hostess Brands mixer and oven operator, was invited to testify before the House Committee on Education and Labor Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions on March 7.

Morgan was the only retiree to provide testimony to the Congressional Committee. Morgan delivered the following:

My name is James Morgan and I live in Blue Island, Illinois in suburban Chicago. I retired after working for 33 years at Hostess Brands' Wonder Bread bakery first in Chicago and then in Hodgkins, Illinois, a Chicago suburb. I worked at the bakery until the company went bankrupt and closed its doors in 2012.

I am currently collecting my pension from the Bakery and Confectionery Union and Industry International Pension Fund, known as the B&C Pension Fund, and working part time to help make ends meet.

During my career at Wonder Bread, I was active in my Union, BCTGM Local 1, a Local Union with nearly three thousand members and several thousand retirees. I served as a shop steward, Chief Steward and was a member of the Local Union Executive Board.

During my 33 years in the bakery, I worked many different jobs including mixer and oven operator. Working in an industrial bakery is an extremely physically-demanding job. You are on your feet for at least eight hours and usually longer because we worked a lot of overtime. In the summer, the temperature in the bakery could get to 100-120 degrees. It was stifling.

For much of my career as a mixer, I had to lift hundreds of pounds of ingredients in 100 pound and 50 pound bags and pour it into the mixers every day, all day long. We worked weekends and holidays and never had off two days in a row. That's how the baking industry is.

Thirty three years in the bakery take an enormous toll on your body. It's very rough on your back, your neck, your feet, your arms and your legs. It's grueling.

Thanks to my Union and the strong contracts we negotiated, my co-workers and I earned a middle-class wage and good benefits for the hard work we did.

And no benefit was more important to us than our defined pension benefit. We negotiated and fought for our pension because we knew that having that pension meant that we would be able to retire with dignity after a lifetime of very hard work.

In fact, having a good pension was so important to us that we would often negotiate less in pay raises in favor of increasing our negotiated pension benefit level. In some years, many of us took all, or a portion, of our negotiated pay increases and purchased additional pension benefits. This was money out of our own pockets. That's how much we valued our pension.

As the Chief Steward, I knew everyone working in that bakery. We were proud to be making the most famous bread in the country, Wonder Bread. We gave it our all. If the bakery

had not closed, I would probably still be working there. We were working to provide for our families and we were working for a decent retirement.

It is very disturbing to me when I hear people saying that our pension was "GIVEN" to us by the company. Hostess didn't give us the pension. We bargained for it as part of a compensation package. As I said, we sacrificed wages and other benefits to secure, maintain and improve our pension benefits. Those benefits were part of our earnings.

In August 2011, the CEO of Hostess Brands sent a letter to every employee saying that the company was suspending the contributions it was obligated to make to the B&C Pension Fund according to our collective bargaining agreement. He said the suspension of contributions was going to be "temporary."

That was not true. The company never resumed making payments to the Fund. They never intended to. The executives were just sucking whatever money they could out of the company and the bakeries. In fact, during the bankruptcy, a number of executives actually took huge pay raises, some as much as 300 percent. Fifteen months later, the company went out of business. Our bakery was closed and we were out of work.

Not only were we out of work. We also had new fears about the future of our pension benefits. We learned shortly after the bakery closed that the federal bankruptcy court allowed Hostess just to walk away from all of its pension fund contribution obligations. That was nearly one billion dollars.

The enormous financial damage done to the B&C Fund by Hostess Brands, the very same company my co-workers and I dedicated our careers to, means that we could lose everything we worked for and sacrificed for through no fault of our own.

The Hostess executives and private equity owners who mismanaged the company, ran it into the ground and put it in bankruptcy walked away with millions of dollars. They left the dedicated workers who helped build the company and create the profits with an uncertain future in our retirement years.

Would our guaranteed benefits always be there for us? Would our pension checks get cut as we got older? How would we pay the bills? Would we be able to afford our prescriptions? Would we be a burden on our children and other family members?

All of these questions have been hanging over our heads since the company closed the doors. I stay in close contact with many of my former co-workers. We are truly fearful about what will happen to our pension benefits. It is very stressful for all of us.

I know that our Union leaders and the Pension Fund are working as hard as they can to protect the pension benefits of every retiree, like myself, who depends on those benefits to get by and everyone still working who is counting on those benefits when they retire.

I am certainly not an expert on pension funding. But I do know that my Union and the B&C Pension Fund strongly support H.R. 397, the Rehabilitation for Multiemployer Pensions Act. They believe long-term, low-interest loans as called for in the legislation will lead to the longterm solvency of our pension fund and help the retirees like me who depend on our pension checks to get by.

It is responsible, bipartisan legislation that will effectively address the pension funding crisis in our country. My pension benefits have not made me rich. Not at all. But my pension check each month is the only way I am able to make ends meet.

If I lost those benefits or they were cut, it would be devastating. I definitely would not be able to pay my bills each month, afford groceries and take care of necessary medical needs. I don't know what I would do. I know almost all of my former co-workers are in the same position.

Madam Chairwoman, we are counting on Congress to do whatever it takes to protect our pensions. We are not asking for a handout. We earned our pension benefits. We worked hard for our pension benefits. We sacrificed for our pension benefits. We were guaranteed our pension benefits.

We did our part by putting in an honest day's work under difficult conditions. All we are asking for is fairness.

BCTGM International President David Durkee, Assistant to the International President Harry Kaiser and B&C Funds Executive Director John Beck accompanied Morgan to the Congressional hearing.

Local 6 Members to Congress: "My Retirement Security is Vital. PROTECT MY PENSION!"

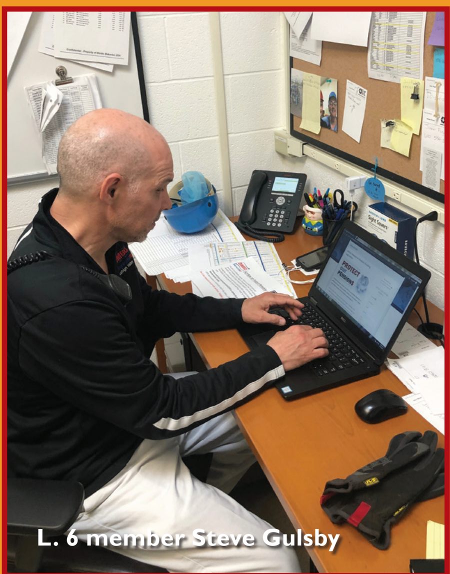
BCTGM Local 6 members at the BIMBO Bakeries USA plant in Lehigh Valley, Pa. took time during a recent (union) break to send emails to their U. S. Representatives to urge support for H.R. 397, the Rehabilitation for Multiemployer Pensions Act. The legislation calls for long-term, low-interest loans that will lead to the long-term solvency of the B&C Pension Fund and help union retirees who, like them, will depend on their pension when they retire.

"It is responsible, bipartisan legislation that will effectively address the pension funding crisis in the U.S.," notes BCTGM International President David Durkee.

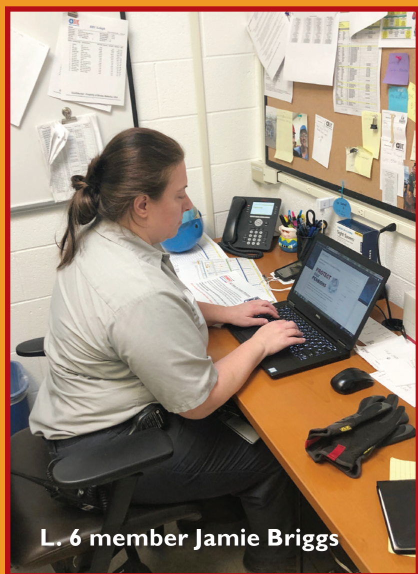
President Durkee has issued a call to action to every BCTGM member and retiree to send letters to Congress on this very important legislation. The Local 6 members at Bimbo rallied around the issue and organized an online activist hour to collectively send letters to their U.S. Representatives.

In part, the Local 6 members urged Congressional action stating, "I am very concerned about this country's growing pension plan funding crisis. This crisis threatens my pension benefits and my future retirement security."

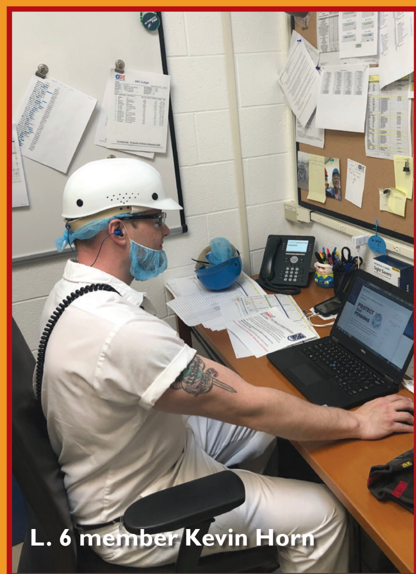
Join this important legislative activism by visiting the BCTGM's online action page as noted on page 16 (back page) of this magazine.



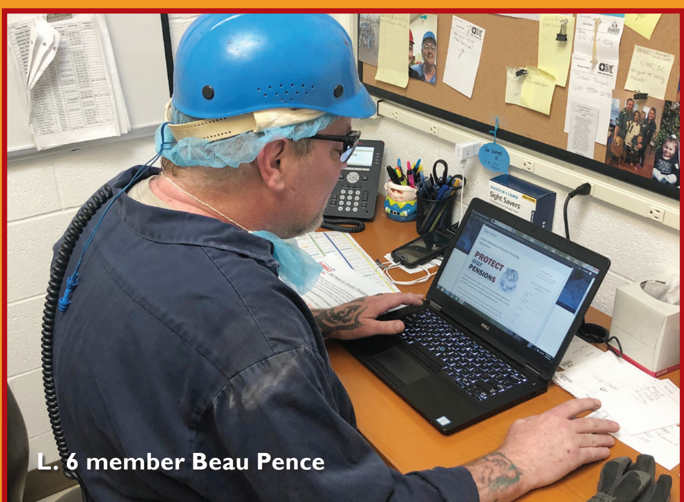
L. 6 member Steve Gulsby



L. 6 member Jamie Briggs



L. 6 member Kevin Horn



L. 6 member Beau Pence

BCTGM L. 6 members gather to send letters to their respective U.S. Rep. during their break at the Bimbo Bakeries USA manufacturing plant in Lehigh Valley, Pa. Pictured here, from left, is Bob Maines, Beau Pence, Dennis Adkins, Tyson Welch and Steve Gulsby.

CANADIAN News

Ford Government BAD NEWS for Ontario Workers

When Doug Ford was campaigning to become Premier of Ontario, he consistently talked about wanting to govern for working people, for the "little guy" that the elites had forgotten. However, since becoming Premier of Canada's most populous province, the actions of his government in the first year suggest that working families are at the bottom of his list of priorities.

Similar to the forces that elected Donald Trump as President of the United States is 2016, Ford ran as an outsider and promised to fix what was most affecting Ontarians: high energy bills, skyrocketing rent and home prices, aging transportation systems, and long hospital wait times. These issues point to the deepening widening of income inequality in Ontario; Ford proclaimed to be the champion of those at the bottom.

And yet, almost a year into his term as Premier, it is clear that the policies being espoused by the Ontario Conservatives are doing virtually nothing for working families and are instead, a giant giveaway to large corporations and the rich.

Within months of taking power, Ford immediately set to work gutting important social programs. Like Trump in the United States, Ford began to target those most vulnerable: the poor, the abused, and the elderly. Programs for sexual assault victims were defunded and a panel to end violence against women was disbanded. School and social housing repairs were cancelled. Support for new mental health funding was cut. Post-secondary grants for low-income students were eliminated. And millions of dollars more were cut from other essential programs that are important to those struggling to get by. All were part of Ford's efforts to find $6 billion in "efficiencies".

Ford's attack on the labor movement was almost immediate. In only his second month in office, he legislated striking York University professors back to work. Months later he did the same for workers at Ontario Power Generation. The government is also considering freezing all public sector worker pay and benefits, even if a collective agreement is in place.

The Ford government didn't just attack public sector workers. It also lashed out at private sector workers too.

In October 2018, the government repealed Bill 148 (Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act) which was a series of labour law reforms put into law by the previous Liberal government. The law was set to raise the province's minimum wage; mandate equal pay for part-time and temporary workers doing the same job as full-time employees; increase vacation entitlements to three weeks after a worker has been with their company for five years; require that employees be paid for three hours if their shift is cancelled within 48 hours of its start; and, expand personal emergency leave to 10 days per year, two of them paid.

According to Ron Piercey, BCTGM Vice President for Canada, Ford is blatantly attacking the dignity of work. "He believes that if you work in low-wage sectors, you don't deserve a decent wage and workplace protections. If you are a teacher or a nurse, you are spoiled. He's saying to Employers across Ontario that it is okay to target your unionized workers," said Piercey.

RETIREES Corner

Social Security Trust Fund STRONGER than a Year Ago

Social Security's financial health is on the upswing, according to an April 22 report from the Social Security Trustees. The system's reserves are now projected to last until 2035 (a full year longer than last year's report projected), with the government able to pay 80% of benefits after that time – but only if Congress does nothing to fortify Social Security's finances. This year, Social Security will take in more than it pays out. As a result, the asset reserves of the combined trust funds will increase by $3 billion in 2018 to a total of $2.895 trillion. Here are some of the Trustees' other key findings:

- Social Security's projected actuarial deficit over the next 75 years has shrunk from last year's projection – from 2.84% to 2.78%.
- The program's $6.7 billion in administrative costs was a "very low" 0.7 of total expenditures.
- The combined Trust Fund asset reserves earned an effective annual interest of 2.9% in 2018.

Two pieces of legislation before Congress address Social Security's weaknesses. U.S. Rep. John Larson's (D- Conn.) Social Security 2100 Act and U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders' (I-Vermont) Social Security Expansion Act. Both bills ask the wealthy to pay their fair share to strengthen Social Security, something overwhelming majorities of the American people support in poll after poll.

The Trustees of the Medicare program report that the federal senior health care program's finances look about the same as they did in 2018. Medicare's Part A trust fund will become depleted in 2026, at which time the system still could pay 89% of benefits. But, again, this is only if Congress takes no action to bolster Medicare's finances.

Richard Fiesta, Executive Director of the Alliance for Retired Americans, disputes the "gloom and doom" forecasts of the Trustees reports on the Social Security and Medicare Trust Funds:

"Social Security is not in crisis. It will continue to be a robust cornerstone of a secure retirement for millions of current and future retirees," says Fiesta.

"If no changes are made, the system will be able to pay retirees 75% of projected benefits after 2035. However, if we remove the cap on earnings subject to Social Security contributions for the wealthiest Americans, we can expand Social Security benefits, provide a more accurate formula for cost-of-living adjustments, and increase the system's long-term solvency.

"The Trustees also found that the Medicare Trust Fund for hospital care has sufficient funds to cover its obligations until 2026. To help strengthen Medicare, Congress and the Administration should rein in the cost of prescription drugs, which is a significant driver of health care costs. There is no reason that American consumers and taxpayers should continue to pay the highest prices in the world for medicines.

"Americans have earned their Social Security and Medicare benefits through a lifetime of hard work. We can best support current and future generations as they retire if we take common-sense steps today," concludes Fiesta.

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– James Morgan, Retired Local 1 Member and former Hostess Mixer & Oven Operator, in testimony to the House Committee on Education and Labor Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions.

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